

HARC honors donor and volunteers at May meeting and celebration May 10, 2022

At the Hagerstown Area Religious Council's (HARC) May 2022 meeting, a generous donor and important volunteers who helped the organization survive and thrive through the pandemic were recognized for their contributions.

Like many organizations, HARC struggled as COVID shut down gatherings and programs, but we were blessed with funding and dedicated volunteers who sustained and breathed new life into the work we do and the connections and relationships in our community. While many more hands and hearts went into this work than we could recognize in this day, there are some who stand out as God's special hands and feet during this time.



In 2019, **Mike Johnston** approached HARC, seeking a project or program to support through his father's God's Grace Fund. His father, Maurice Johnston, was disabled after a stroke, and Mike wanted to serve in a way that honored his father's strong faith and desire to spread God's love in our community. After a time of thought and prayer, Rabbi Ari Plost, HARC's president asked if Mike would offering a matching donation through the God's Grace Fund to help

increase HARC's part-time executive director position to full-time, providing enough funding through the initial gift and its match to sustain the position for two years while HARC grew its sustainability. Mike immediately felt led to support this effort, donating \$18,500 as a matching gift, which Rabbi Plost and Rev. Jake Caldwell found funds to match.

At this time, Kathy Powderly, HARC's executive moved out of country, and HARC sought a new executive director, with the blessing of funds for full-time. Not long after, the pandemic hit. Like other ministries, HARC's income was affected. And in early 2021 HARC was again without an executive director. Without this funding, HARC may not have survived.

Not only did HARC survive, but in 2021 we began to once again thrive. Rev. Elizabeth Jackson, HARC's president, and the HARC board weathered the storm and led the vision into sustainability and growth and new ways to serve the community. With funds still in the bank, and much work left to be done, Kathy returned from Costa Rica and into the role of full-time executive director.

In the last year, HARC has not only recovered, but *expanded* our programs to include an active racial justice team. Without the funding support from the God's Grace Fund, we wouldn't have

been able to do this or to grow Micah's Backpack to once again serve more than 1,000 children, or partner to collect 13,000 books for vulnerable children in the 2021 Community Book Drive.

We are thankful to Mike Johnston for his support of HARC, through this gift, through help with the HARC Hike, and through continued giving by Mike and his wife (and HARC Hike volunteer), Beth Johnston.

Cindy Brown, member of Otterbein United Methodist Church, shared that Mike lives out the legacy of his father, **Maurice (Mo) Johnston**, a generous man who lived out his faith, quietly and anonymously. Maurice supported his church and many organizations, always with the comment "Don't tell anyone I did this." He started the God's Grace Fund with the Community Foundation as a way to give anonymously and ensure that God received the credit. Nothing in the fund description gives his name. HARC also honors Maurice Johnston for his generosity and a lifetime of living out his faith.



Several volunteers have also contributed to HARC's success and faithful work in Washington County, not just in the pandemic, but for many years. Charlotte Trout is one of those volunteers.



In 2012, HARC built its first website, with the work of the new part-time executive director and the help of a volunteer designer. However, maintaining a website and keeping it fresh and relevant is a LOT of work. **Charlotte Trout**, member of Christ's Reformed Church in Hagerstown, stepped up to help with this arduous task.

Over the years, the website has grown more and more robust, and was professionally redesigned in 2019 with new features. Throughout all this time, Charlotte has faithfully kept the site up-to-date, and looking great, learning new ways to work in the format along the way. Thanks to Charlotte, you'll find our website to be full of a wide variety of resources, as well as including a robust calendar of events and fresh news posts. If you haven't checked it out recently, please do! <https://harccoalition.org/>

Charlotte is an amazing person as well as web volunteer. She's always cheerful and helpful, making suggestions and giving encouragement. During the height of the pandemic, she didn't miss a beat in continuing to maintain the website or support HARC. In addition to the website,

she gives in other ways, sharing her faith, time and resources to support HARC's work. She has taught parents in our Learning Parties, helped with check-in at the HARC Hike, and compiles the annual summer calendars of Vacation Bible School and other free/low-cost children's activities. Many thanks to Charlotte for all she does!



Kelly Conrad is also a quiet, behind-the-scenes volunteer who contributes greatly to HARC's work through many talents. Kelly wasn't referred by anyone, but came to HARC as an angel out of the blue. She found our website, was interested in the ministry and thought she might be able to contribute with her PR & marketing skills. And boy how she's contributed! Anything we put out that looks professional was designed by Kelly, or Kelly had her hands in it making it better.

Kelly is an extremely talented designer, patient with a good ear and instinct for the image we want to portray, with a deep faith and desire to stay true to the heart of what we do as a connected people of faith. She has transformed HARC's letterhead, brochure, flyers, and other marketing materials from amateur pieces to professional representations of an active organization.

In addition to her design skills, Kelly is a phenomenal writer (check out her book "Shaman" if you enjoy historical romance); HARC has benefited from these skills as well. And she maintains HARC's Facebook page, increasing our visibility and interactions to more than 600 followers!

Kelly has also contributed many ideas to improving the HARC Hike, which has made the event more fun and profitable. In 2020, she even took the reins to lead coordination of this event and make a virtual hike successful, raising \$15,000 in spite of the pandemic. Most recently, Kelly has begun to help in the HARC office, taking some administrative tasks off of Kathy's plate, so she can focus more on mission.



For all of the ways Kelly contributes, HARC is very grateful!



To many in our membership and throughout the community, our most faithful and longest serving volunteer, **Rev. Ed Poling**, is well known. "Ed Poling is to me a mentor, spiritual guide, leader and friend," shared Kathy Powderly. "He's the mainstay of HARC since I've been a part of this organization, and long before."

Ed's father was a member of Washington County Council of Churches (now HARC), so he started getting involved at a young age! As pastor of

Hagerstown Church of the Brethren for many years, Ed was always a member and very active. A few of the many contributions he's made are:

- He was part of starting the **Interfaith Coalition** after 9-11, has led the group, supported the group, planned events, held meetings at his home, and is still very engaged to this day, even as it has morphed back into HARC as an interfaith team.
- While Ed loves interfaith work, he's shared this work has actually deepened his faith as a Christian. So, in addition to working with people of many faiths, Ed also has been dedicated in planning HARC's **Good Friday Walk** each year for many years, with a small, dedicated team. This actually started as a Good Friday Walk for Social Justice in downtown Hagerstown, then was moved to City Park for the quiet and contemplative setting. Since then, it has grown to as many as 100 participants from all different Christian denominations.
- Ed has served on the HARC board of directors, including in the Vice President position, until he retired. He remained on the board as the Interfaith Coalition Coordinator for several years thereafter.

Not only is Ed faithful, caring, meditative and peace-oriented as a pastor and leader, but he's also an active "doer" and incredible athlete, the energizer bunny who never seems to run out of "go"! The HARC Hike for Hunger & Hope began with Ed. Ten years ago, in 2012, HARC made the God-led decision to hire an executive director to coordinate the work of the faith community and make a real difference in the community. HARC had very little money in the bank to do this, but was going on faith!



In belief of what we could do *together*, Ed set out to raise funds for this new position. He hiked the entire 41.5 miles of the Appalachian Trail in Maryland – the Maryland Challenge – in **one day** with sponsorships to raise funds for HARC. This was a grueling day of hiking, starting at 5:00 am and ending after 10:00 pm, alone and exhausted.

Ed still guides us as hike leader of the HARC Hike, which is now held on both the AT and the C&O Canal towpath – two separate days (and many fewer miles). His steady guidance, attention to details and logistics have helped make the event SAFE as well as successful. Timing is always right on, and we know we're not going to get lost in the woods with Ed leading. Ed also continues to raise funds through the longer HARC Hike Challenge each year, raising as

much as \$5,000 in sponsorships while hiking in any condition – even wading through water up to his waste in flooding.

We are truly blessed to have Ed in our midst and leadership. “Personally, I’m not sure what I would do without you, Ed, so you need to stay healthy for many more years!” exclaimed Kathy Powderly. We believe these sentiments are shared by many.



Finally, we honor Rev. Elizabeth Jackson. Pastor Elizabeth (a.k.a. PE) has been a part of HARC since she came to Hagerstown and Otterbein United Methodist Church in 2016 and was thrust into hosting HARC’s annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Service as a commitment from the prior pastor. Engaging in community outreach is part of her job description, but Elizabeth goes about this work with joy, love of God, and belief in our work together as a faith community. HARC is blessed to have her as a member and now president.

Rev. Todd Young, Rector of St. John’s Episcopal Church and HARC Board member, shared the following:

“Elizabeth Jackson has been HARC president for the past 2-3 years. She had a difficult job in the best of times, having immediately followed Rabbi Ari Plost who did much for HARC’s visibility and Gregg Meserole who led HARC for six years (although it may have felt much longer). Stepping into the role of president was not going to be easy, but Elizabeth was primed to take over that leadership position.

As I said, she would have had a difficult job in the best of times, and then things took a turn.

Shortly after becoming president Kathy announced that she and her husband Kyle were going to Costa Rica to teach English. And not long after that we all found ourselves in the middle of the COVID pandemic.

COVID and the search for a new ED created special circumstances none of us were prepared for; but through it all, through personnel challenges and the challenges of figuring out how we could hold HARC meetings when everything was shut down, Elizabeth did an admirable job keeping us focused, keeping us calm, keeping us safe, and keeping us HARC.

Eventually the pandemic began to wane enough for us to begin gathering in person. Eventually Kathy returned to Hagerstown. And with those changes Elizabeth was able to lead the way in bringing Kathy back as Executive Director.

For these things and for many more that I have probably forgotten, I want to thank Elizabeth. She has been a great leader in difficult times. As she prepares to leave parish ministry and move into hospital chaplaincy and leave her role as HARC president behind, I am confident in saying that she was the right person at the right time for this job.

Thank you, Elizabeth, for your leadership and for your friendship, and know that you will be missed.”

Kathy Powderly echoed this sentiment: “Part of what brought me back to HARC was Elizabeth. I knew I would enjoy working with her and I’ve greatly appreciated her leadership and vision.”

We give thanks to God for bringing these and other amazing volunteers and generous givers to HARC. We couldn’t do this work without you!